CHANTAL CORNUT-GENTILLE D'ARCY
Dpto. de Filología Inglesa y Alemana
University of Zaragoza

ABSTRACT

The act of communication, in this paper, will be understood as the way in which some part of the past is conveyed to us. Undoubtedly, the cultural importance of historical communication derives from its potential to influence thoughts and attitudes on and about particular events. Hence, the aim of this paper is first, to examine how insights from different disciplines have, this century, contributed to broaden and rectify historical accounts of and about witchcraft. From there, the subject will focus on why the female sex was more frequently accused of witchcraft, most cases of witchcraft being susceptible of natural explanations. In the final part of the paper, the analysis will centre more directly on verbal communication by exposing how the old misogynistic charges against "wicked witches" persist today in certain expressions.

KEY WORDS: *women's history. witchcraft*

RESUMEN

En este artículo entendemos como acción comunicativa el modo por el cual se nos transmite parte del pasado. La importancia cultural de la comunicación histórica deriva sin lugar a dudas de su potential para influir sobre los pensamientos y las actitudes acerca de determinados acontecimientos. Por lo tanto, el propósito de este artículo será, en primer lugar, examinar como las aportaciones de diferentes disciplinas han contribuído en este siglo a ampliar y rectificar la visión histórica acerca de la brujená. Posteriormente, el análisis se centrará en los motivos por los que las acusaciones de brujená recaían con mayor frecuencia sobre el sexo femenino, teniendo en cuenta que gran parte de los casos eran susceptibles de una explicación natural. Por último, el estudio abordará de forma más directa la comunicación verbal mediante la exposición de como la antigua misoginia contra las "brujas perversas" persiste todavía en ciertas expresiones.

PALABRAS **CLAVE:** *historia de mujeres, brujería*

As an introduction to the last chapter of their work, ***Riding the Nightmare***, Selma **R.** Williams and Pamela Williams Adelman describe one of Francisco Goya's famous caricatures of witchcraft in which he carefully includes all the details that had once frightened and fascinated society (1992: 204). The etching, titled "Linda Maestra," represents a witch - an old hag - passing on her secrets to a young, female apprentice as they fly through the air on a broomstick to, supposedly, meet with witch cronies.

Given that the very word "communication" irnplies the transmission of some kind of information or intelligence (Stanford, 1996: 80) then, from a cultural viewpoint, Goya's drawing undeniably represents a historical "document" that is sending out a non-verbal, yet unequivocal, historical cornmunication (Fèbvre; 1953: 30). "Linda Maestra" can therefore be seen as illustrating how, in very real ways, *Communication* not only reflects but actually creates *Culture* for the etching irnplicitly carries with it the ability to direct our thinking by fixing the image of the "wicked witch" in our minds.

To the question of whether such superstition and folkiore involving the practice of evil has been more easily applied to women than to men, the observable, historical answer is, without doubt, yes. The murderous war waged on European women in the 16th and 17th centuries has, since then, formed the theme of uncountable verbal and non-verbal "communications." However, another undeniable truth is that while chroniclers have, once and again, depicted the horrors of the mass killing of women they have, right up to the 20th century, mostly ignored the victirns.

By linking these assertions to the opinion of a major historian of the witch craze, H.C.E Midefort, who noted that: "... the European witch craze ... displayed a burst of misogyny without paraliel in Westem history" (Ruth; 1992: 67), it very quickly becomes evident that "cornmunication" and the forms of legitimisation of knowledge have, for long, amounted to a skewing of reaiity.

With this in mind, the aim of this paper is first, to examine a combination of insights from different disciplines that have, this century, contributed to broaden and rectify historial accounts of and about witchcraft. From there, the subject will be narrowed down to the question of why people found it more natural to associate witchcraft with the femaie sex rather than with the male sex and of why the fear-laden rejection of women rose to a sort of campaign of extermination against them. In the final part of the paper, I shall centre my analysis more directly on verbal communication by exposing how certain words, still currently in use today, somehow perpetuate age-long misgivings about those women whose allure somehow subjugates men.

For most of us, nowadays, the idea that human beings may have the power to harness occult forces m order to serve good or evil purposes is as defunct as the notion of a flat earth, and as unlikely to be ever revived[1]. However, this has not aiways been so. For this reason, the premise for this paper is a very leveliing thought: the great craze for persecuting witches that raged throughout Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries cannot be waved aside as simply an embarrassing episode in Westem history, especially if we keep in mind more recent outbursts of brutality. This very century, the Nazi extermination of Jews and McCarthy's persecution of communists and homosexuals are good examples of how, at any time, panics of persecution may erupt with astonishing violence and subside just as suddenly, leaving everybody bewildered and confounded at the mania that has swept through society.

In the span of 200 years or so, beginning in the later fifteenth century, a great many people, most of them women, were prosecuted for witchcraft, tortured and executed. It is difficult to know how many people died in ihis 200 year craze but some scholars have claimed that the death toll of the Witch Hunts equals the sum total of casualties in all the European wars up to 1914 (Armstrong, 1986: 90).

Historians by the hundred have, in all periods, documented ihis mass killing. However, an important development of 20th century historical research has been how, thanks to the work of Marc Bloch and Lucien Fèbvre, founders of the new school, *Les Annales* (1929)[2], historical perspective has broadened its outlook by incorporating the investigation undertaken in other disciplines. Anthropology and sociology, for example, are two of the sciences that have produced new understanding of the contexts in which witchcraft was practised and accusations laid. By concentrating on the SOCIAL environment of witch trials, anthropological and sociological modes of inquiry have unravelled and partly set right the bias and presuppositions found in older historical writings about European witchcraft which tended to concentrate too exclusively on the ideas of contemporaneous thinkers.

Historians of witchcraft have also leamt from psychology - by that I mean modern knowledge of such disorders as hysteria and schizophrenia which help to explain why some people quite sincerely believed they attended witches' sabbaths or were possessed by devils. By pooling their knowledge, the historian and the psychologist have thrown considerable light on the mental states of victims in the witch-prosecuting centuries. According to Trevor Roper (1990: 50-51), many written accounts of the experience of accused women represent straightforward case-studies of sexual hysteria familiar to every 20th century psychiatrist - the only difference being that whereas today the psycopath's obsession is usually a private obsession - an obsession which may vary from patient to patient, in those days, the fixation often centred on the Devil - a figure which has since lost much of his cultural importance. Not only on the devil for, as Trevor-Roper explains: although, in the past, many neurotics and hysterics centralized their illusions around the figure of the devil, many others (in this case, saints and mystics) centralized theirs around the figure of God or Christ. So, whereas devout maidens would pledge themselves to God and feel themselves to be the brides of Christ, less pious witches not only communicated with, but bound themselves to Satan and felt themselves to be his concubines. It is a well known fact, for example, that St Teresa enjoyed ecstasies of pleasure as she clung to the mystical body of her Saviour. For their part, hundreds of witches who were dragged before their judges, reported to have felt agonising pains as they lay crushed in the embrace of that huge black figure of Satan. It is interesting to note how, in the case of St Teresa, psychopathic experience was sublimated to the point of making her a saint while - when the same symptoms were interpreted by inquisitors - the other women were burnt to death.

Likewise, philosophy has been of great assistance to modem historians. Right up to the 20th century, writers usually condemned the beliefs that sustained the witch trials as absurd and unjustifiable - plain (and dangerous) superstitious fanaticism. Nowadays, the historian who thinks philosophically has abandoned this old moralising stance and concentrates instead on why and how a system of beliefs WAS rational for the people at the time (Carr, 1983: 75-8). In other words, contemporary historians have come to see that a belief is not necessarily irrational simply because it is/was false: it is false, for instance, that the sun goes round the earth, but it was not irrational to believe this before the contrary evidence was avaiiable. The

same occurs with witchcraft. People believed in witchcraft when they believed, as we do not, in a universe pervaded by a variety of spirits and spiritual forces, good and bad. With this in mind, the inquisitors were therefore not involved in a cold manufacture of an untruth. Many learned and sophisticated men like Jacob Sprenger and Heinrich Institor, the Dominicans who, in 1486, wrote the first printed encyclopaedia of demonology, the famous *Malleus Maleficarum* (the Hammer of the witches), King James 1 or Jean Bodin (to cite only a few outstanding figures) passionately believed in witchcraft. Jean Bodii, was an expert in history, politics, phiiosophy and law but his deep convictions led him to write *Démonologie et sorciers* (1580), a book that also became a manual for inquisitors in Europe (Trevor-Roper, 1990: 47).

Lastly, the development of women's studies over the last few years has prompted some fresh thinking about why women constituted about 85 % of accused witches (Gittins, 1993: 42). Such studies as those by Selma Williams, Karen Armstrong and Diana Gittins help elucidate the status of women, in theory and in practice, in those early modern times.

As a means of approaching how these women have gone about changing perspectives in the field, a helpful starting point is, no doubt, a clear differentiation between the terms witch, witchcraft and sorcery.

Both witchcraft and sorcery operate through certain hidden, mystical procedures. Witchcraft, according to the anthropologist, Evans-Pritchard (Scarre,1992: 3), is an interna1 power some people possess, an inborn property which they inherit, just as one may inherit being left-handed or snub-nosed. Witches have the power to cause harm without performing any particular act, just by a look or a malicious thought. Sorcerers, on the other hand, don't have this innate capacity for causing harm. They employ instead magical operations, such as chanting spells or verbal formula or performing ritual recipes to accomplish their ends. In other words, in principle, anyone can become a sorcerer by learning the appropriate techniques, whereas to be a witch it is necessary to be bom one. It is interesting to note how Evans-Pritchard's contrast is somehow captured by Sherry Ortner in the distinction she establishes between women and men and nature and culture. In her article "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (Zimbalist Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1993: 67-87), Ortner suggests that the universal, culturally attributed secondary status of women has to do with something that is devalued in every culture. That something, she argues, is Nature, which, in general terms is contrasted with Culture or with technology and ideas. Women are linked with nature first, because of their bodily functions. While women are busy procreating, men are free to dedicate their time and energies to visible, lasting "projects of culture" (1993: 73) - the creation of new instruments or inventions in general, beneficial to the species (1993: 75). Secondly, women's physiological functions place her in more "private" roles (such as caring for, nursing, rearing children) - all these activities generally considered of less importance than men's universalistic "public" roles. And finally, woman's traditional social roles, imposed because of her body and functions, in turn give her a different *psychic structure* - that is, women develop the typical "feminine personality" that tends to be involved with concrete feelings, things and people rather than with abstractness and objectivity that are the domain of men (1993: 81). Ortner quotes Simone de Beauvoir to point out that "woman's consciousness - her membership ... in culture - is evidenced in part by the fact that she accepts her own devaluation and takes culture's point of view" (1993: 76). Women therefore, become cultural beings only by accepting their subordinate, and inferior, role in society.

With this in mind and coming back to the subject of women and witchcraft, it is worth pointing out that both in English and in Spanish there remains, to this day, a clear differentiation between the terms sorcerer and witch/witchcraft and between ***hechicería*** and *brujería*. This said, trial records apparently provide little evidence that offenders were singled out according to whether they were innate - **natural** - witches, or whether these women wielded *scientific* knowledge - culture - to serve their maiicious ends. It seems that the interest of inquisitors did not centre so much on *how* the women acquired their magical powers but rather on the harm they did or could do to society through their malignant spells and incantations (Scarre, 1992: 4). This generaiised inclination is probably what led the French to put all accused women in the same bag, under the unique label: *sorcières*. This said, Sherry Ortner's theory proves useful in that it helps frame the scene from a novel perspective: orthodox learned opinion at the time had it that women's place was with nature and not with culture. Hence, whether the witches' obscure talents were inborn or hereditary or whether their skills and notions of the occult derived from the knowledge or culture reserved for men, these women were feared as ***un-natural*** and accordingly considered a menace to society. In their book, *Riding the Nightmare*, Selma Williams and Pamela Williams Adelman examine the changing status of women over centuries (1992: 3-16). For thousancis of years, they explain, western cultures - whether Minoan, Greek, Roman or Germanic - had adored the Earth Mother or Mother Nature who provided the human species with food, water, clothing, children and, at times, peace. During the Middle Ages, however, the image of woman as kind and benevolent Mother Earth slowly but surely went downhill, until it broke down into the cliché of the wicked old witch. The explanation Williams and Williams Adelman forward for such a drastic change is that, as society moved from a rural, agricultura1 economy to a clustered, urban community, man and woman, little by little, stopped working together. As trade and commerce were becoming more important, agriculture - and with it Mother Nature - lost their ascendency[3]. In other words, the urge for money-making began to replace reverence for earth. Parallely, anything to do with authonty, organisation and power gradually slithered away from women into the hands of man alone. The witch hunt of the 16th and 17th centunes somehow consolidated this recently established asymmetry between the sexes for its aim was to purge society of any female that could somehow jeopardise the new social balance.

A lethal epidemic known as the Plague or Black Death hit Europe between 1347 and 1351 and killed one out of three Europeans precisely when the One Hundred Years War was raging between England and France (Bishop, 1978. 365-69). Throughout this same period, the authonty of the Church was tottering, with the papacy forced to flee from Rome to Avignon (1308-78) and then, with the loyalty of Christendom divided between two nval popes, each denouncing the other as the anti-Christ (1378-1417) (Carter & Mears; 1968: 234). Moreover, whoever survived disease, war and natural disaster faced the threat of slow death by starvation. There was simply not enough food to feed everyone, especially as an unexplainable change in weather, throughout the 14th century, brought violent stonns and crop-destroying rains that caused mass death by famine. The people could find no obvious reason for so many disasters and deaths, so surely some sinister force must be at work. The Middle Ages blamed first one sub-group, then another: Jews, beginning around 1100; and women, sometimes afterwards. Jews it was said, murdered babies to obtain blood for their annual spring feasts, while women, as the earthly personification of Mother Nature, were blamed for raising storms on land and sea, for causing droughts or floods, producing excessive heat or cold and for killing babies,

youngsters and neighbours. After 1500, the primary emphasis shifted on to witches - especially since most Jews had been driven to take refuge in Eastern Europe. According to Williams and Williams Alderman (1992:18), the connection between anti-Christian Jews and evil witches is pointedly stressed in the terms "synagogue" and "the sabbath" which, they explain, were both used from then on to describe the witches' sacrilegious meetings with the devil.

At a time when science and scientific knowledge was incipient[4], superstition logically prevailed. Men therefore acted on what they had been told and taught - not on what they could prove. Consequently, to single out a witch was easy, even if she was never actually caught in her evil activities, and never seen riding on a broomstick..

First, even women's "natural" powers made them immediately suspect (Rowland, 1993: 10-14): there had always been (and still was) something unfathomable about women who had the ability to produce a live human being from within their own bodies, something no man, not even a king (time of absolute monarchies) could do.

Secondly, a witch's appearance also exposed her. At a time when most women died before the age of forty through hunger, overwork and, above all, because of continua1 childbirths, a woman who was still going strong in her fifties or sixties was feared rather than protected. Needless to say that behind the dread of old hags lay a more prosaic reality: in an age when food and fuel were so scarce, a woman too old to bear children, and worse still, if she suffered from some physical deficiency, was no longer useful to society. In ***The Family in Question*** (1993: 35-43), Diana Gittins also offers valuable insight on this point. In her view, western society had, from time immemorial, been organised around the concept of the paterfamilias, which meant that wives and children were invariably in a situation of dependence on their husband/father. These notions of servitude and dependence, Gittins explains, were bolstered by the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church to justify women's exclusion from positions of power. However, in the late medieval period, economic relations changed with the growth of wage labour and this posed a problem for traditional religious and patriarchal ideology, hinged on notions of dependency and deference to male authority. With changing economic relations came Protestautism. By stressing the importance of ***individual*** responsibility to God rather than to temporal delegates, Protestantism contained within it a challenge to patriarchal authority, for this new religious ideology assumed that men, women and children were equal in the eyes of God. If women were as good as men in God's eyes, why could they not share equal access to temporal wealth and power? The way in which this dilemma was solved was to argue that women and children were equal in God's eyes, but only in a spiritual sense and only if they served God through serving a father or husband in a temporal household[5]. Consequently, from then on, women could attain salvation through good works and a devout iife in the "private" spiritual realm of the family while men had to attain salvation thorough good works in the "public" sphere as well as being responsible *paterfamilias*. Women were therefore doubly dependent because their means of salvation was only really possible through dependence on a father's or husband's authority within a family household. On top of that, with Protestantism, celibacy and convent life were no longer considered valid options for women - a fact that put an added importance on marriage for (especially) the female sex. This said, many women - spinsters, widows, abandoned wives - could not live in a patriarchal household. Being "outside marriage", and therefore outside patriarchal control and authority, made such women ***unnatural***, dangerous and threatening to

society. It was, in Gittins's view, the fear and suspicion of women in such situations that resulted in the massive persecution and execution of "witches".

Midwives made up another whole group of witches (Russell, 1983: 84; 112; 115). In this pre-scientific age when miscarriages, haemorrhaging and stillbirths were so frighteningly common, it was customary for expectant mothers to look beyond the Church for hope and salvation. They therefore anxiously sought any charm, elixir or superstitious ceremony that would, they believed, stave off viable death. Nor is there anything extraordinary about women helping sisters, daughters, cousins, and neighbours during pregnancy and delivery. However, in those credulous times, a woman acting as rnidwife inevitably exposed herself to suspicion: if she brought both mother and child safely through childbirth, she could be accused of calling on the supernatural. If, on the other hand, either mother or child, or both, died, this could also be interpreted as clear evidence of the midwife's evil powers.

As for women who dared to assert themselves, they certainly deserved execution for witchcraft for they were behaving contrary to history, the Bible, and the generally accepted inferiority of females to males in mental capacity and physical strength. The most famous example is, of course, Joan of Arc who, on her own, turned the tide of the Hundred Years War in favour of her native France and against the English invaders. Her success against the English was the underlying, and purely political, reason for her persecution. However, the accusations against her were couched in religious terms and she was finally executed for her evil dabbling with the supernatural (Bishop, 1978: 380-82).

In her book, *The* Gospel *According* to *Woman*, Karen Armstrong contends that the witch was a wholly Christian creation (1986: 88-116). Although witches and witch-lore had existed as pagan superstitions long before the 15th century, the essential ingredient for the transformation of witchcraft into a Christian heresy was, in her view, the Christian invention of Satan - a fearful monster which represented the sum total of all the evil people could not accept in themselves. Since sexuality was one of the evils that Christian men could not accept, they had first repressed it and then projected it on women. For centuries, Christian theologians and preachers had alienated and isolated women so that their contaminating and sinful sexuality should not draw men into sin. In the 15th century, with the introduction of the printed page, there appeared written - tangible - evidence that women were a wicked, malevolent form of the human species, as shown in the following passage from the Malleus: "What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours!" (Williams, 1992: 35).

Such expressions as "natural temptation, desirable calamity" or "delectable detriment" clearly point to the sexual neurosis that affected the Church: men believed themselves to be the unfortunate victims of women's devastating sexual allure. At the heart of such a formulation is, of course, the woman Eve who was the initial "cause" of all human beings wailowing in sin[6]. With the appearance of Satan in the Middle Ages, it was oniy a matter of time, Armstrong argues, before these two monstrous sexual projections of Medieval Christianity should come together. In this way, and not surprisingly, the demonology enshrined in such works as the Malleus *maleficarum* attributed the power of witches to their special links with the devil, especially their sexual relationships with him as "incubus" (embodiment in masculine form). Since it was through sexual intercourse with Satan that they acquired the supernatural powers to harm and even ruin mankind, witches suddeniy became,

not only heretics of the most dangerous sort, but worse still: they were identified as Devil's whores, that is, as monstrous sexual beings who indulged in cannibalistic rites and perverted sexual orgies. Karen Armstrong's basic standpoint is therefore that the events of the 16th and 17th centuries mark a period when the long-standing terror of sexuality and hatred of women, impressed on all Christians by the Church, finally exploded: if Christians had been brain-washed into believing that women were sexually depraved beings and the enemies of man, with the appearance of Satan, sex now became diabolical and women the arch-enemies of society. The Malleus confirms this point by listing seven ways in which women who are in league with the Devil attack men, nearly all of them sexual:

> Now there are, as it is said in the Papal Bull, seven methods by which they infiect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb: first by inclining the minds of rnen to inordinate passions; second by obstructing their generative force; third by removing the members accomrnodated to that act; fourth by changing rnen into beasts by their magic art; fifth by destroying the generative force in women; sixth by procuring abortion; seventh by offering children to devils (Armstrong, 1986: 95).

The implication in the Malleus is that women had acquired a new and sinister power which capacitated them to maim rnen sexually by diabolic magic: they could force sexuality on unwilling men by provoking uncontrollable sexual urges in them; they could render a man impotent by means of a spell or a curse or, worst of all, witches could actually castrate men: "a witch *can* take away the male organ, not indeed by actually despoiling the human body of it, but by *concealing* it with some glamour" (my emphasis) (98). An interesting point is that although authors like Trevor-Roper, Norman Cohn, Evans-Pritchard or Jeffrey B. Russell insist that the women who died in the holocaust were old and crazy (1990: 48; 1975: 225; Scarre, 1992: 3; 1983: 130)), there is nothing old and ugly about the witches in the Malleus. Indeed, the book is quite clear that part of a women's danger is precisely her beauty: "... a woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch and deadly to keep" (Armstrong, 1986: 101). It is also worth noticing what has happened since then to the word "glamour." Nowadays, the term "glamour" still carries with it the meaning of magic, a spell, a charm (*OED*). For this reason, it is often used to refer to a type of feminine beauty that is powerfully alluring. However, bearing in mind that "glamour," according to Armstrong, originally signified the witch's ability, through magic, to castrate rnen (1986: 100), it would appear that "glamour" in a woman implies that she is beautiful and seductive but foul and dangerous all at the same time.

My point here, based on Karen Armstrong's theory, is that although women are no longer burned or hanged as witches, or synonymous with evil, the influence of the Witch Craze still lingers today in the myth of the *castrating bitch*. The castrating bitch is a "glamorous" woman who makes the most of her glossy, artificial beauty to enslave men. For this reason, she is called "a vamp" - a kind of monster, which is beautiful and seductive, foul and dangerous all at the same time. Shakespeare drew a portrait of a witch like this in Cleopatra who "unmans" Antony to the point of making him neglect his empire and even run out of the battle of Actium in pursuit of her. Such a *femme fatale* is literally fatal to man, not just because she can cause his death (as Cleopatra causes Antony's) but because, through her

castrating power, she can get at the very core of his Self: his virility. In this sense, Cleopatra is a secular version of the witch who was persecuted by the Church during Shakespeare's time.

The witch as the essence of woman - cruel, sensuous and dangerous, constantly surfaces in literature. The myth continues even in the 19th century, a period marked by its cult of the sexless woman, and consequently, not a time when one would expect to find many sexy witches. Becky Sharp, in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair,* is an example of the malevolent witch whose sexy charm even makes her a murderess and Rossetti's poweríul portraits of erotic, threatening and dangerous women like Pandora or Lucrecia Borgia show that the witch continued to exert the same attraction over the imaginations of men. In our own century, the myth of the glamorous woman has actually been reinforced by the media. For all their sexiness, film stars, cover girls and models like Marilyn Monroe, Ursula Andress, Kim Basinger, Uma Thurman, Demi Moore, Sharon Stone or Claudia Schiffer, Naomi Campbell, Judith Masco and Linda Evangelista have the same kind of impenetrability as Cleopatra. Their very glamour - their beauty and eroticism - entraps and enslaves men even while the "touch me not" aura that surrounds them warns the cornmon of mortals that they are untouchable and unconquerable. Hence, although men drool over the beauty of such women, they are, in a sense, emotionally castrated because they know that these dazzling modem witches are not for them.

It is interesting how many witchcraft terms have survived in language: words like "magical", "enchanting", "ravishing", "bewitching", "fascinating" all describe the way a sexy woman gains power over men. "Fascination", for instance, in the language of witchcraft, is the power of casting an evil spell or inflicting bad luck ***(OED)***.When today we say that a woman is fascinating we mean that she is irresistibly and mystenously attractive. The fascinating look has therefore changed over the centunes but it still has a hostile edge to it: a wornan who sets out to fascinate a man wants to bring him under her spell. Not all women can be glamorous or fascinating witches simply because most of us lack the potential for gloss in our appearance. However, if a woman cannot be Claudia Schiffer she can cultivate "charm". Charm is of course another of those witch words that has lost its original malevolent meaning on the surface. Nowadays, to say that a woman is charming is a compliment. We rarely think of the original meaning whereby to charm somebody is to put an evil spell on her/him ***(OED)***. Yet, to use charm - to set out to "butter up someone", in a way, can be as castrating as glamour, especially if one considers the act of, for instance, charming a snake: to charm a snake is to subdue it so that it is no longer dangerous, but completely under the charmer's power. Likewise, to charm a man can be interpreted as an attempt to subdue or blunt his power by means of a web of sweetness - just as Delilah unmanned and castrated Samson when she cut off his hair after luring him to sleep by her soft flattery.

To conclude, if we think more carefully about what communication really is, then it becomes clear that although histoncal accounts or records of the past are conveyed mainly in words, the information transmitted is not merely a set of words but a set of *ideas.* Accordingly, by communicating knowledge, history carries with it the capacity to alter beliefs, values, the outlook and the understanding of readers. Hence, the cultural relevance of historical writings is twofold. On the one hand, history as communication of knowledge serves to divulge past cultural practices while, on the other, it both reflects and gives shape to present-day culture. With this in mind, the Witch Craze of the 16th and 17th centuries cannot be discarded as an unfortunate - and never to be repeated - historical phenomenon. For its

impact to be rightly understood, it must be seen both in its social and in its intellectual context. The relatively recent contributions of scholars working in disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy and feminism have, in their different ways, amended or "redressed" the distorted accounts of this disturbing Westem event known as the Witch Craze by revealing that, in those times of upheaval, society tried to stamp out those sub-groups whom it could not assimilate. When crisis and cataclysm occurred, someone had to be made responsible and woman, the weaker being and the conspicuous incarnation of evil, was the obvious scapegoat - especially if she disturbed the "natural" social set-up in any way. Once the witch had become the stereotype of the enemy, witchcraft - that innate capacity for causing harm - would be the universal accusation. It was an accusation diffícult to rebut in those days of superstition and popular prejudice. Nor was it long before Satan should tum to this mentally and morally deficient being for his evil purposes: if woman had always been responsible for luring men to sin by her sexual power, her pact with the Devil now equipped her with the power to bewitch, incapacitate or even mutilate men by diabolic means. Lastly, although the persecution of wicked witches - these monstrous enemies of God and man died out by the end of the 17th century and even though we have chosen to "forget" such events as the Witch Holocaust, in some sense, it is still not totally over. It continues to affect language and amtudes. In other words, certain "complimentary" expressions evidence that men and women still choose to think about women sexually in terms of witchcraft, however thoroughly we think we have emptied the words of their original hostility.

NOTES

1. The belief only lingers in those underdeveloped, rural areas of, for instance, the Celtic regions where high levels of iiliteracy and supersition still prevail.
2. See: Marc Bloch (1967) and Lucien Fèbvre (1953).
3. By highlighting the *economic* basis of the domination of woman by man, Selma Williams and Pamela Williams Aldelman's analysis comes very close to Friedrick Engels's delineation of the family structure as the instrument for the exercise of male supremacy. See: (1884) 1986, ***The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.***
4. It is significant that the beginning of the witch craze coincided with the first phase of the scientific revolution. In fact, the peak of the witch craze occurred precisely during the decades in which Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Johannes Kepler and Galileo Galilei made their revolutionary contributions. Brian Easlea (Ruth, 1992: 67) suggests that, in *one* of its aspects at least, the scientific revolution may be seen as a secularised version of the witch craze. He explains his point by specifying that Bacon: "likened the experimental investigation of the secrets of "female" nature to the inquisition of the witches and looked forward to the time when masculine science would shake "female" nature to her very foundations."
5. The division established between spiritual and temporal can be seen as the origin of the concepts of "public" and "private," stemming from the Protestant attempt to solve - somewhat artificially - a contradiction between individual equality and hierarchical patriarchal authority.
6. In the Dark Ages, it was Augustine's theology which dominated Christian thinking. According to Augustine's formulation of the doctrine of Original Sin, the first sin was not sex but disobedience - Adam took the apple even though God told him not to. The result of that sin is that Christians are continually plagued by what Augustine caiis "concupiscence". Concupiscence means the desire man has, against all reason, to take pleasure in mere creatures or in things instead of in God. So, concupiscence is the essence of sin because it makes us lose our reason and irrationally choose things that are less than God. Nowhere is the loss of rational control more acutely felt than in sex and sexual desire. This is the reason why, for centuries, sex had been seen as evil and women as the enemies of man: woman is forever Eve, luring man to his doom.

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